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SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING COUNSELING SERVICES FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH. (TITLE SUPPLIED).

BY- LOVE, RUTH B.
CALIFORNIA STATE DEPT. OF EDUCATION, SACRAMENTO

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THE EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGE IN AMERICA'S CHANGING SOCIETY IS TO BRING EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO ALL. SCHOOL COUNSELORS MUST EXPAND AND STRENGTHEN THE SERVICES THEY OFFER. THE COMMON DENOMINATOR AMONG SO-CALLED "DISADVANTAGED" GROUPS IS POVERTY, AND EDUCATORS MUST UNDERSTAND BOTH THE PROBLEMS AND THE POSITIVE QUALITIES OF THE POVERTY CULTURE. NEW, POSITIVE APPROACHES MUST BE USED IN A MIDDLE-CLASS-ORIENTED EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN ORDER TO SUCCEED WITH DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS. FAMILY FOCUS IS A NECESSARY PART OF COMPENSATORY EDUCATION PROGRAMS. LISTS OF RECOMMENDATIONS RESULTING FROM A SERIES OF WORKSHOPS DEALING WITH EDUCATION OF THE DISADVANTAGED CHILD ARE PRESENTED TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TO COORDINATORS OF GUIDANCE SERVICES. (PS)

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Strengthening Counseling Services for Disadvantaged Youth

Prepared by Ruth B. Love

Special Consultant

Bureau of Pupil Personnel Services

[CALIFORNIA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, SACRAMENTO]

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SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The educational challenge of this century is to bring equal educational opportunities to all youth. In our rapidly changing, pluralistic society, with the emerging aspirations of racial and ethnic minority groups and others of low social and economic status, educators are faced with the task of providing a structure of learning in which each child can discover his world, pursue goals, and develop himself in accordance with his true abilities. Of primary importance in making education meaningful for all youth is the broad range of services offered by practitioners of guidance and counseling. Authorities declare that no phenomenon is more fundamentally American than this professional discipline. A focus on the individual, his abilities, his aspirations, and his achievements involves three kinds of counseling: educational, occupational, and personal. Manpower needs and the conservation of human resources, among other considerations, require the best in interdisciplinary teamwork to assure that educational opportunities are made equal.

In order to help young people develop the skills, attitudes, and personal resources necessary to meet the demands of today and tomorrow, school counselors must expand and strengthen the services they offer. Teachers and parents, as well as students and dropouts, have come to perceive that counselors have a central role in providing access to educational opportunities.

Impact of Poverty

The common denominator among so-called "disadvantaged" groups is poverty. Some 700,000 young people in California lead lives of economic, social, and educational deprivation. Minority group children who are from low-income families not only face the hardships of poverty but may also experience difficulties and conflict because of their racial or ethnic identity. In California, a nonwhite family is twice as likely to be found in poverty as its white counterpart. While a great deal of stress is given to understanding and explaining the "problems" resultant from or inherent in a life of poverty, of equal importance are the difficulties imposed by the schools themselves.

Essential to an understanding of the culture of poverty is the awareness of the strengths or positive aspects of such a culture. Children handicapped by poverty have not only environmental and social limitations, but they also possess elements of strength that enable them to cope with their environment. Programs of education may well take cognizance of both the problems and the positive qualities of the poverty culture.

Trends in Counseling the Disadvantaged

Authorities in education and related fields proclaim the necessity for new, creative approaches in meeting the needs of young people of low-income status. Middle-class-oriented schools must reshuffle and innovate, for just as the youth fails in school, so the school fails the youth. In terms of counseling, a constant plea is for emphasis on preventive as well as remedial programs at

the elementary and preschool levels. It is not enough, we are told, to develop an intellectual knowledge of the problems of poverty. What is imperative is empathizing and seeing experiences through the eyes of the poor. The poor themselves should become involved in the educative process.

Family focus is part of compensatory education programs, and reaching parents requires some different methods. In developing coordinated, comprehensive programs, we are reminded that only when these "projects" become a vital part of the total school approach will equal education be a reality. In this search for new solutions to old problems, educators may well discover ways of strengthening educational services for all youth.

Educators have long been aware of the correlation between economic status and school achievement. The crucial question is, "Must a child, merely because of his socioeconomic status or his ethnic background, receive a kind of education that leaves him unprepared for a full, contributing life?" Recognizing that intelligence knows no class or color, educators generally and counselors specifically must foster the growth and development of each individual to his full potential. To assist in this endeavor, the State Steering Committee, the regional planning committees, and the participants in the workshops formulated some recommendations that the State Department of Education and the coordinators of guidance services may wish to consider.

Recommendations to the State Department of Education

It was suggested that the State Department of Education do the following:

1. Make available to districts more information regarding scholarships designed specifically for minority groups and college and university programs for students from low-income families.

2. Provide funds for the development of demonstration guidance projects for children from low-income families.

3. Assist and encourage offices of county superintendents of schools in planning more inservice meetings in the area of intergroup relations and in developing innovative counseling programs for disadvantaged youth.

4. Make available reports of national action-programs in pupil personnel services designed for such youth.

5. Encourage and assist state educational associations in becoming more actively involved in the area of the disadvantaged or minority youth.

6. Repeat the regional workshops or sponsor a conference relative to counseling considerations for disadvantaged youth for the purpose of extending the sharing and learning of those who participated and to involve persons not present at these meetings.

7. Disseminate materials to districts regarding current legislative measures, such as the Compensatory Education Bill, Economic Opportunity Act, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

8. Develop a statewide comprehensive program in dropout prevention, beginning at the elementary level.

9. Coordinate the programs of guidance and counseling, compensatory education, school social welfare, and other specialized activities.

10. Create a central research and resource center for the purpose of collecting and disseminating materials.

Recommendations to Coordinators of Guidance Services

It was suggested that guidance directors do the following:

1. Help counselors strengthen their services to disadvantaged youth by employing such techniques as group counseling, role playing, cultural enrichment, and so forth.

2. Offer specific assistance to counselors in working with parents of children from families classified as poverty stricken.

3. Form "study teams" of counselors for the purpose of exploring creative ways of improving guidance practices.

4. Keep staff informed about national and state projects in counseling youth from low-income families.

5. Provide information relative to financial aid and special college and university programs designed for disadvantaged or minority youth.

6. Inform counselors of literature related to disadvantaged children and youth.

7. Provide opportunity for counselors to examine their own feelings and attitudes about disadvantaged youth and their families.

8. Help those working with such youth to see problems of poverty through the eyes of the poor.

9. Assist counselors in better understanding the value concepts of poor people, and develop a nonjudgmental framework relative to these differences in values.

10. Enable counselors and teachers to recognize and capitalize on the "strengths" in the culture of poverty.

11. Assist counselors in fulfilling their roles by exposing students to a wide range of opportunities, free of occupational and educational advisement.

12. Interpret the role and function of counseling to administrators and other school personnel so that counselors will be allowed to perform tasks inherent in the counseling process with realistic counselor-pupil ratios.

13. Employ more counseling personnel with diverse cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. (It was also suggested that attempts should be made to seek some counselors who have backgrounds of poverty.)